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AUTHOR McIsaac, Marina Stock
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the experiences of faculty and students at Anadolu University (Turkey) who participated in Globaled, a global education, computer-mediated communication project. The project, initiated at the University of New Mexico, included faculty and students at four other American universities and those at Anadolu. The paper examines the potential of the computer to offer information to people who have traditionally been information poor by providing them with networked data through the electronic classroom setting. A case summary of the participation of Anadolu students in a Globaled pilot project in the spring of 1992 is then described. Issues that emerged as a result include pedagogy, motivation, access to information, technical difficulties, and language. The benefits of a global classroom, as identified by participants, are discussed, and questions about what networked information will be made available, for whom, and under what conditions are raised. (Contains 8 references.) (KRN)

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The Global Classroom: An International Perspective

Author:

Marina Stock McIsaac

Abstract

What happens when a global classroom, using computer mediated communication (CMC), connects students internationally? This paper reports the experiences of faculty and students at a Turkish university, Anadolu University, who participated in Globaled, a global education computer mediated communication project. This project, initiated at University of New Mexico, included faculty and students at University of Oklahoma, Florida State University, Arizona State University, University of Wyoming and Anadolu University in Turkey.

The paper begins by examining the question of empowerment, the potential of the computer to offer information to people who have traditionally been information poor, by providing them with networked data through the electronic classroom setting. The discussion proceeds to describe how computer-mediated communication can address this question of empowerment. Following the discussion is a case summary of the participation of students at Anadolu University, Turkey, in a pilot project with Globaled_during the Spring Semester of 1992.

As a result of participation in the Globaled program, certain issues emerged which should be taken into consideration if future global classroom situations are to be successful. Issues of 1) pedagogy, 2) motivation, 3) access to information, 4) technical difficulties and 5) language need to be addressed. Finally the benefits of a global classroom, as identified by participants, are discussed. Enthusiasm for computer-mediated communication as an inexpensive way to gain access to information, provide opportunities for practicing a foreign language, and to introduce friends across international boundaries were the most frequently cited advantages. In conclusion, important questions must be answered such as what networked information will be made available, for whom and under what conditions, in order for global education to truly provide equal opportunity for all participants.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is one example of an interactive technology which allows the user to have access to a wide variety of resources using existing global networks. The use of CMC for delivery of instruction in industrialized countries has been well documented (Phillips, Santoro & Kuehn, 1989), (Phelps, Wells, Ashworth & Hahn, 1991), (Cheng, Lehman & Armstrong, 1991). In examining the issue of equity and computers, Sutton (1991) concluded that considerable research has been conducted on equity issues among white middle-class students, but that much remains to be done in examining equity issues among other populations. Davie and Wells (1991) make a strong case for the empowering attributes of CMC in the electronic classroom setting.

What has received less attention is the degree to which CMC on a global scale empowers those in cross-cultural or cross-national settings. For the first time users in such settings can access worldwide information sources, select materials appropriate to their topics, discuss ideas with colleagues around the globe, encounter new ideas, and make significant contributions in a truly global exchange of thought. This paper explores the implications of such global information exchange using CMC in settings which have traditionally been termed "information poor".

Empowerment

To empower is to give power to those persons who for social, economic or political reasons, did not previously have that power. The movement to provide empowering opportunities developed as a result of the struggle to provide people with equal educational opportunities, so that they could participate and make well informed decisions in the global community. In order to do that, access to information quickly became the key factor. At the same time, telecommunications technology developed to the point that information databases can now provide answers to questions within minutes. Access to such information gives the user a sense of self-confidence in being able to make well-informed decisions.

For too long, empowering tools and information sources have been available primarily to the affluent dominant cultures whose decisions have affected not only themselves but the world at large. This historical trend can be traced to the Middle Ages when the people who had access to written materials determined the distribution of information which was interpreted and later made available to the masses. The Gutenberg revolution changed the way people received information and it was no longer necessary to have

information interpreted before it became available to all. With the most recent technological revolution, and the development of computerized information networks, we have moved one step closer to providing truly equal access to information around the world. The availability of such information allows the user of computer networks the satisfaction of being able to communicate with others on a global scale, sharing information, concerns and points of view. These new users are participating as colleagues contributing their own resources, not simply as recipients of information, and they are making their own contributions to network dialog. When people become active participants in decision making, their curiosity and interest in the educational process and in self-improvement begin to grow. As numerous research studies indicate, when given the opportunity students enjoy using technologies such as computers and networks for learning.

Technologies are considered by many to be empowering tools. The access to information provided by computer networks is believed to provide equal opportunity for users who want to participate in decisions of the greater global community. Many feel that the division between wealthy and poor countries, that is the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', will be lessened by the acquisition of knowledge through networks. These networks can give individuals a new confidence in their ability to read and synthesize information which is so abundantly available in Western countries. For this reason, many developing countries like Turkey have invested heavily in modern technologies of instruction.

Computer-mediated communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an electronic system using telecommunications for bulletin boards, electronic mail, and computer conferencing. It is computer conferencing, the ability to use the computer for group work independent of time and location, which promises the greatest opportunities for empowerment (Waggoner, 1992). Many educators have expressed the notion that CMC has the potential to emerge as a new educational paradigm, sharing the stage with traditional education and various forms of distance education, but unique in the interactivity it provides independent of time and space (Kaye, 1989). This interactivity promotes collaborative learning in a less restrictive setting than has been thus far possible. Now students in different locations can, asynchronously 24 hours a day, participate in on-line seminars, on-line discussion groups and other collaborative learning activities (Harasim, 1989).

Global classroom networks which use computer-mediated systems encourage international dialog and resource sharing. One of the pioneers in developing the concept of the global classroom is Takeshi Utsumi, President of GLOSAS (Global Systems Analysis and Simulation) who has worked to develop models of the "Global University" and the "Global Lecture Hall" which provide resources allowing less affluent countries to keep up with advances in global research and education (Utsumi, 1990). The global classroom, using the network resources of international research networks like BITNET, EARNET and INTERNET, can provide online discussion opportunities for students around the world. One such global classroom was the Global Education Project (Globaled) designed by Professor Gunawardena at the University of New Mexico in the Spring semester of 1992. Four universities participated in a global computer-mediated classroom on the topic: Theory and Practice of

Distance Education. Three of the universities were in the United States and one was in Turkey.

During the Spring semester of 1992, students from Anadolu University participated in this Globaled classroom, a classroom without walls which had as its focus the discussion of issues related to educational technology and distance education. The participating class at each university submitted a question related to distance education which other students were encouraged to answer, debate, and question. In addition, students were encouraged to respond directly to others and form subgroups if their topics proved particularly interesting. One goal of the exchange was to develop in students the ability to analyze and synthesize information as well as to develop their communicative abilities on an electronic network. In addition, students were encouraged to participate actively in the discussions and not merely be recipients of information.

The Turkish Case

For the second-year students attending Anadolu University in Eskisehir, Turkey who participated in the Global Classroom, communicating via the EARN network to their peers on another continent seemed like an impossible achievement. Many of the students were from Anatolia, and some had grown up in Eskisehir. Their knowledge of American students came primarily from their exposure to American television programs, and they were anxious to learn more about the conditions and way of life of their fellow students. They were eager to practice their English skills and many of them spent hours reading and composing messages.

Besides making new friends and practicing English, students at Anadolu were eager to get information about their course topic which was not available at their university library. Because the cost of an imported textbook may

easily be half a month's salary of the average worker, students and even faculty members can not easily purchase foreign text materials. Therefore, most textbooks used at Anadolu are written in Turkish by Turkish professors and many of those are translations from texts published outside Turkey. Where foreign texts are available, they are photocopied and distributed to students whenever possible.

Given this setting, it was v ith enthusiasm that students approached the task of learning the mechanics of getting online to access the EARN network. The job was not an easy one. The few machines at the university which were connected to EARN and available to students were constantly in use and generally in need of repair. Cookie crumbs, sesame seeds and cigarette ashes which fell into the keyboard caused keys to malfunction. The repair procedure employed by the computer center security guard was to turn the keyboard upside down and beat it into working. In addition, the university ran out of coal in January and in the computer laboratory, an unheated cement building, the fingers of even the most enthusiastic students would quickly tu.n cold. Add to that the intermittent electrical failures, keyboards with sticking letters, the temperature in the room, and the difficulty of access, it was remarkable that students remained enthusiastic about the process.

After learning how to use the EARN network and being given the topic for discussion of that week, the students in Turkey would discuss the issues among themselves. Because the semester at Anadolu started almost two months into the semester in the United States, the Turkish students were at a double disadvantage. Their language skills were not at the level of the university students in the United States, and they came into the computer conference when the conference was one-third over. Nevertheless they were fascinated with what the technology could do for them and they immediately asked for

library articles and other resources which, they recognized, the other students had available to them. Students at Anadolu took part in the conference for a period of 6 weeks. They did not participate fully due to time of entry into the discussion, lack of fluency in English, lack of adequate resource materials for discussion, and inadequate facilities.

Results

The experience at Anadolu University indicates that there are a number of issues which need to be addressed when the electronic classroom cuts across international borders. These have been grouped into 5 areas.

First, issues of pedagogy must be discussed in advance to be certain that educational assumptions are mutually agreeable. In many countries, the prospect of electronic communication is viewed as a one-way link to the outside world in which questions and requests flow in one direction and materials and resources flow in the other. In addition, many countries rely on rote learning as their primary pedagogical principle. Divergent thinking, analysis, problem solving and group discussion have not been desireable in such educational programs. If the expectations of one group participating in the global classroom are not similar to the expectations of the other, the project will experience some difficulty.

Motivation is a second area which needs to be examined to determine differences between students in various cultures. Both intrinsic and external motivating factors are very diverse in the international community. A student in one setting may have selected a course of study where another student may have been required to take it.

Access to facilities which provide information is not normally available to the general student body in many countries as it is in North America.

Information, especially when provided by electronic means, is frequently viewed as the domain of the faculty, particularly the science and engineering faculty. This attitude, that the use of technology is reserved for elite faculty members in the divisions of science and mathematics, must be challenged if students are to have access to information for making well informed decisions.

Technical difficulties such as frequent power outages, broken down equipment, lack of technical support and a large percentage of downtime often plague those students who most need to be encouraged to use the technology. As a result of these technical problems, students in such situations fall farther and farther behind their international colleagues during the semester.

Finally, the issue of language is one which must be considered in any international classroom. Although students in many international universities read and write English, the amount of written material which is sent electronically, coupled with the particular jargon of the field can cost the foreign student many hours of deciphering. Without the 'face-to-face' signals of a questioning expression or a vacant look, the communicator has little idea that his or her message should be made shorter and more concise. Most important ideas can be communicated in the space of one screen. Part of the international experience, when working with people whose English is a second language, is to simplify language and concepts so that the international student can participate in the exchange of information rather than merely be a recipient of information.

Conclusion

In spite of the many drawbacks which students at Anadolu University encountered in this experiment participating in a global classroom, students

who joined the project expressed their enthusiasm for computer-mediated communication as a way to practice their English, get information, draw informed conclusions about topics discussed, develop confidence in their ability to communicate with others, make friends around the world, and promote world peace. In short, they felt empowered with new skills and abilities to access information and participate in a meaningful exchange of ideas on a global scale.

As INTERNET links join more global classroom projects together, students and faculty will find themselves involved in meaningful exchanges of information with colleagues around the world. Library resources which are so limited and costly will soon be available online and via fax to remote locations around the world. As we begin to answer the question of how to provide equal access to information, we must look ahead at what kind of information will be shared. Will it continue to be information by, from and for the dominant cultures? Or will computer-mediated communication truly empower those in developing countries to become full participants in the decision making process of the global community? Therein lies the challenge that faces implementation of the new telecommunication technologies, in order to help people achieve their full intellectual pote tial.

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